

Connect360: The Burial of Jesus

February 6, 2023

- *Lesson 8 in the Connect360 unit “The Beauty of Restoration: The Final Days of Jesus” focuses on John 19:38-42.*

Joseph of Arimathea is mentioned in all four Gospel accounts of Jesus’ burial (Matthew 27:57; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50). John is the only writer to highlight the secret nature of Joseph’s spiritual life.

Scholars debate exactly what it means that Joseph was a member of the Council. Some suggest this was a local body, not the nationally oriented Sanhedrin. In either case, Joseph was a more than casual religious dabbler. Luke 23:51 says he was “waiting for the kingdom of God.” He was looking for God to restore the glory of the earthly kingdom of David, to put Israel back on the map. His focus was on the rituals of religion to ensure an earthly kingdom. He wanted to satisfy God with his own righteousness. Only later did he realize this right relationship with God came only through the righteousness of Christ.

Fellow Council member Nicodemus also previously had been identified by the apostle John as a spiritually curious, yet extremely cautious member of the Jewish leadership (John 3). Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. The Lord made a special point to highlight Nicodemus’ lack of understanding. Perhaps this is a subtle glance back at John’s opening (1:5), where he makes a specific note that the darkness does not comprehend the light. The two learned scholars of Israel were deeply puzzled by Jesus’ “new” teachings.

These two men were spiritually sensitive. It seems they were open to what Jesus taught during his three-year ministry, but they did not make a wholehearted commitment right away. Joseph kept his faith questions

hidden for the same reason any Jewish religious leader would have. His status in the community would have sunk to the depths, and it is quite possible his financial portfolio would have followed. After all, who in their right mind would do business with a Jesus follower?

No doubt, some of John's readers could identify with the quandary in which Joseph found himself. Do I risk losing my business connections? Can I bear the ridicule and possible harm to my family? Our community connections could easily be jeopardized if we are connected with the itinerant preacher who calls himself the Son of God.

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